

Rules of the Game

Polymorphing (Part Four)

By Skip Williams



Parts Two and Three covered some fundamental aspects of polymorphing by examining the *alter self* and *polymorph* spells in detail. This time, we'll look at additional polymorphing and shape changing effects.

Baleful Polymorph

This spell is intended for offensive use. It works much like *polymorph*, except as follows:

- The spell works on any creature within range (close).

The target need not be willing or living.

- The spell has a permanent duration.

A subject under the effects of the spell has a moderate aura of transmutation magic (see the *detect magic* spell) while the spell lasts. The effect can be dispelled according to the normal rules for doing so.

- The caster changes the subject into a Small or smaller animal of no more than 1 Hit Die.

The caster must choose an animal species whose typical size is Small or smaller.

- The subject is allowed a Fortitude save to resist the spell; if the form chosen would be fatal to the subject, it gains a +4 bonus on the save.

The chosen form is "fatal" if it cannot survive in the current environment. For example, if you choose to turn the subject into a goldfish on dry land it will suffocate.

- If the Fortitude save fails, the subject must then make a Will save to avoid taking on the mental characteristics of the assumed form.

If the Will save succeeds, the subject merely takes the assumed form, exactly as if subjected to the *polymorph* spell (see Part Three).

If the Will save fails, the subject loses all its extraordinary, supernatural, and spell-like abilities. It loses its ability to cast spells (if it had the ability), and gains the alignment, special abilities, and Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores of its new form in place of its own. It still retains its class and level (or HD), as well as all benefits deriving from class and level (such as base attack bonus, base save bonuses, and hit points). It retains any class features (other than spellcasting) that aren't extraordinary, supernatural, or spell-like abilities.

- Incorporeal or gaseous creatures are immune to being *polymorphed*, and a creature with the shapechanger subtype can revert to its natural form as a standard action.

Polymorph Any Object

A general purpose spell, *polymorph any object* is similar to both *polymorph* and *baleful polymorph*. It works on any creature or object, and it can turn the subject into any other creature or object (but not an incorporeal or gaseous creature or object).

A creature turned into another creature with this spell is affected just as if transmuted with a *polymorph* spell, except that the subject also gains the Intelligence score of the assumed form. The change in Intelligence doesn't affect the subject's skill points.

A creature turned into an object has no Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma scores. It has no senses and cannot perceive its surroundings in any way. It is considered unconscious, just as a petrified creature is. If the subject cracks or breaks, but the broken pieces are joined with the body as the subject returns to flesh, the subject is unharmed (also like a petrified creature). If the subject's body is incomplete when it returns to its normal form, the body is likewise incomplete, with the appropriate disability.

The spell's duration depends on how radical the change between the subject's original form and its assumed form as shown in the spell description. Regardless of the spell's duration, the subject has a strong aura of transmutation magic (see the *detect magic* spell) while the spell lasts. The effect can be dispelled according to the normal rules for doing so.

Because this spell can allow the subject to assume unliving forms, you can use this spell to turn the subject into a construct or undead creature.

You can use *polymorph any object* to duplicate the following transmutation effects: *baleful polymorph*, *polymorph*, *flesh to stone*, *stone to flesh*, *transmute mud to rock*, *transmute water to dust*, or *transmute rock to mud*. (*Baleful polymorph* was added to this list in the *Player's Handbook* errata file.)

Construct Type

You get the following:

- No Constitution score. (A natural consequence of not being alive.)
- Immunity to all mind-affecting effects (charms, compulsions, phantasms, patterns, and morale effects). (Natural ability.)
- Immunity to poison, sleep effects, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects, and necromancy effects. (This stems from your lack of a Constitution score.)
- Cannot heal damage on their own, but you often can be repaired by exposing yourself to a certain kind of effect (see the creature's description for details) or through the use of the Craft Construct feat. A construct

with the fast healing special quality still benefits from that quality. (This also stems from your lack of a Constitution score.)

-- Not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage, ability drain, fatigue, exhaustion, or energy drain. (A natural ability.)

-- Immunity to any effect that requires a Fortitude save (unless the effect also works on objects, or is harmless). (This also stems from your lack of a Constitution score.)

-- Not at risk of death from massive damage. Immediately destroyed when reduced to 0 hit points or less. (This also stems from your lack of a Constitution score.)

-- Because its body is a mass of unliving matter, a construct is hard to destroy. It gains bonus hit points based on size, as shown on the table in the *Monster Manual* glossary. (A natural consequence of not being alive.)

-- Proficient with its natural weapons only, unless generally humanoid in form, in which case proficient with any weapon mentioned in its entry. (You don't forget what you know, but a change to construct form doesn't get you any weapon proficiency that's not listed here.)

-- Proficient with no armor. (You don't forget what you know, but a change to construct form doesn't get you any armor proficiencies.)

-- Constructs do not eat, sleep, or breathe. (A natural ability.)

You don't get the following:

-- Darkvision out to 60 feet and low-light vision. (Extraordinary special qualities.)

-- Since it was never alive, a construct cannot be raised or resurrected. (If you were once alive you can be raised or resurrected even if you're killed while in construct form.)

Undead Type (*Polymorph Any Object*):

You get the following:

-- No Constitution score. (A natural consequence of not being alive.)

-- Immunity to all mind-affecting effects (charms, compulsions, phantasms, patterns, and morale effects). (A natural ability.)

-- Immunity to poison, sleep effects, paralysis, stunning, disease, and death effects. (This stems from your lack of a Constitution score.)

-- Not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability drain, or energy drain. Immune to damage to its physical ability scores (Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution), as well as to fatigue and exhaustion effects.

(This also stems from your lack of a Constitution score.)

-- Cannot heal damage on its own if it has no Intelligence score, although it can be healed. Negative energy (such as an *inflict* spell) can heal undead creatures. The fast healing special quality works regardless of the creature's Intelligence score. (You get this trait, but, since you retain your Intelligence, you can heal damage)

-- Immunity to any effect that requires a Fortitude save (unless the effect also works on objects or is harmless). (This also stems from your lack of a Constitution score.)

-- Uses its Charisma modifier for Concentration checks. (This also stems from your lack of a Constitution score.)

-- Not at risk of death from massive damage, but when reduced to 0 hit points or less, it is immediately destroyed. (This also stems from your lack of a Constitution score.)

-- Not affected by *raise dead* and *reincarnate* spells or abilities. *Resurrection* and *true resurrection* can affect undead creatures. These spells turn undead creatures back into the living creatures they were before becoming undead. (If you were once alive you can be raised or resurrected even if you're killed while in construct form.)

-- Proficient with its natural weapons, all simple weapons, and any weapons mentioned in its entry. (You don't forget what you know, but a change to undead form doesn't get you any weapon proficiency that's not listed here.)

-- Proficient with whatever type of armor (light, medium, or heavy) it is described as wearing, as well as all lighter types. Undead not indicated as wearing armor are not proficient with armor. Undead are proficient with shields if they are proficient with any form of armor. (You don't forget what you know, but a change to undead form doesn't get you any armor proficiency that's not listed here.)

-- Undead do not breathe, eat, or sleep. (A natural ability.)

You don't get the following:

-- Darkvision out to 60 feet. (Extraordinary special quality.)

Shapechange

This spell represents the ultimate polymorph effect. It works much like *polymorph*, except as follows:

- The spell works only on the caster.

The spell has a personal range and a target of "you," so you can share it with your familiar or other companion with the share spells ability.

- You can choose any form except that of a unique creature.

You can choose a form of any type, even a gaseous or incorporeal form.

- You gain all extraordinary and supernatural abilities (both attacks and qualities) of the assumed form, but you lose your own supernatural abilities.

As with the *polymorph* spell, you don't retain supernatural abilities that depend on a body part you do not have (such as a mouth for a breath weapon or eyes for a gaze attack). You keep your spell-like and extraordinary abilities, provided your new form has the requisite body parts; for example, you can't retain a rend ability if your assumed form does not have claws.

- You can change form once a round as a free action.

Changing form does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

- When you assume an incorporeal form with this spell, you get all the traits of the incorporeal subtype.

Incorporeal Subtype

-- Immune to all nonmagical attack forms

-- Even when hit by spells or magic weapons, it has a 50% chance to ignore any damage from a corporeal source (except for positive energy, negative energy, force effects such as *magic missile*, or attacks made with *ghost touch* weapons). Although it is not a magical attack, holy water can affect incorporeal undead, but a hit with holy water has a 50% chance of not affecting an incorporeal creature.

-- An incorporeal creature has no natural armor bonus but has a deflection bonus equal to its Charisma bonus (always at least +1, even if the creature's Charisma score does not normally provide a bonus).

-- An incorporeal creature can enter or pass through solid objects, but must remain adjacent to the object's exterior, and so cannot pass entirely through an object whose space is larger than its own. It can sense the presence of creatures or objects within a square adjacent to its current location, but enemies have total concealment (50% miss chance) from an incorporeal creature that is inside an object. To see farther from the object it is in and attack normally, the incorporeal creature must emerge. An incorporeal creature inside an object has total cover, but when it attacks a creature outside the object it only has cover, so a creature outside with a readied action could strike at it as it attacks. An incorporeal creature cannot pass through a force effect.

-- An incorporeal creature's attacks pass through (ignore) natural armor, armor, and shields, although deflection bonuses and force effects (such as *mage armor*) work normally against it.

-- Incorporeal creatures pass through and operate in water as easily as they do in air.

-- Incorporeal creatures cannot fall or take falling damage.

-- Incorporeal creatures cannot make trip or grapple attacks, and they cannot be tripped or grappled. In

fact, they cannot take any physical action that would move or manipulate an opponent or its equipment, and they are not subject to such actions. Incorporeal creatures have no weight and do not set off traps that are triggered by weight.

- An incorporeal creature moves silently and cannot be heard with Listen checks if it doesn't wish to be.
- It has no Strength score, so its Dexterity modifier applies to both its melee attacks and its ranged attacks.
- Nonvisual senses, such as scent and blindsight, are either ineffective or only partly effective with regard to incorporeal creatures. Incorporeal creatures have an innate sense of direction and can move at full speed even when they cannot see.

Wild Shape

This class feature works like the *polymorph* spell, except that wildshape is a supernatural ability that works only for the druid using it. It cannot be shared with the druid's animal companion (or other creature with the share spells quality) because it's a supernatural ability.

The duration is 1 hour per druid level or until the druid resumes her normal form. Changing form (to animal or back) is a standard action and doesn't provoke an attack of opportunity.

At 11th level and below, the druid can assume only animal forms; the size of the animal form to be assumed depends on the druid's level, as noted in the druid class description. Since the power duplicates the *polymorph* spell, the druid gains the assumed form's extraordinary special attacks, but not its extraordinary special qualities. For example, a druid wildshaped into a wolf gains the wolf's trip attack but not its scent ability. The druid's level determines what size animal form the druid can assume.

At 12th level and above, a druid can assume plant forms of the same sizes as the animal forms the druid can assume.

At 16th level and above, a druid can assume elemental forms, with the druid's level limiting the size as noted in the druid class description. A druid that takes elemental form retains her own creature type, but gains all the elemental's extraordinary, supernatural, and spell-like abilities (both special attacks and special qualities), and also gains the elemental's feats. Since the druid does not gain the features and traits of the elemental type, the druid does not gain the elemental's immunity to poison, sleep effects, paralysis, and stunning. The druid also does not gain immunity to critical hits or flanking. On the bright side, the druid retains the ability to be raised or resurrected, provided that the druid could be raised or resurrected in the first place.

Alternate Form

This supernatural special quality works much like the *polymorph* spell; here's an overview, with the differences between the alternate form ability and the *polymorph* spell called out.

- Unlike *polymorph*, the creature is limited to the assumed forms specified in the creature's description.

- Unlike *polymorph*, the creature retains the type and subtype of its original form. It gains the size of its new form.
- The creature loses the natural weapons, natural armor, movement modes, and extraordinary special attacks of its original form. The creature gains the natural weapons, natural armor, movement modes, and extraordinary special attacks of its new form.
- Unlike *polymorph*, the creature retains the special qualities of its original form. It does not gain any special qualities of its new form.
- The creature retains the spell-like abilities and supernatural attacks of its old form (except for breath weapons and gaze attacks). It does not gain the spell-like abilities or supernatural attacks of its new form.
- The creature gains the physical ability scores (Strength, Dexterity, Constitution) of its new form. It retains the mental ability scores (Intelligence, Wisdom, Charisma) of its original form.
- Unlike *polymorph*, the creature retains its hit points and save bonuses, although its save modifiers may change due to a change in ability scores.
- Unlike *polymorph*, the creature does not regain any lost hit points from changing form.
- The creature retains any spellcasting ability it had in its original form, although it must be able to speak intelligibly to cast spells with verbal components and it must have humanlike hands to cast spells with somatic components.

See Part Two for other notes on spellcasting when in an assumed form.

- The creature is effectively camouflaged as a creature of its new form, and it gains a +10 bonus on Disguise checks if it uses this ability to create a disguise.

See Part Two for other notes on using an assumed form as a disguise.

About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and has been the Sage of *Dragon Magazine* since 1986. Skip is a co-designer of the **D&D** 3rd Edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (his borscht gets rave reviews).

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